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LYRICS FROM THE CHINESE

LYRICS

FROM THE CHINESE

BY

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FOURTH IMPRESSION

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
1925

First Published . *December* 1913
Reprinted . . *March* 1914
,, . . *January* 1917
,, . . *May* 1919
,, . . *November* 1921
Reissued . . *March* 1925

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

TO MY FATHER

INTRODUCTION

It is by candlelight one enters Babylon; and all roads lead to Babylon, provided it is by candlelight one journeys. It was by candlelight that John Milton read Didorus Siculus, and by the Third Book he had voyaged beyond the Cape of Hope and now was past Mozambic, and already felt freshly blowing on his face

> 'Sabean odours from the spicie shore
> Of Arabie the blest.'

It was by candlelight that the sea coast of Bohemia was discovered, and the finding of it made a winter's tale. Baghdad is not a city to be seen by day; candlelight is the only illumination for all Arabian nights.

One sees most by candlelight, because one sees little. There is a magic ring, and in it all things shine with a yellow shining, and round it wavers the eager dark. This is the magic of the lyrics of the twelfth century in France, lit candles in 'a case-

ment ope at night,' starring the dusk in Babylon; candles flare and gutter in the meaner streets, Villon's lyrics, these; candles flame in its cathedral-darkness, Latin hymns of the Middle Ages, of Thomas of Celano and Bernard of Morlaix. For if Babylon has its Quartier Latin, it has also its Notre Dame. The Middle Ages are the Babylon of the religious heart.

Every literature has its Babylon. Or rather, like that other Babylon, not of the spirit, Babylon is one, and all nations have drunk of her wine. She, too, is the haven desired of 'everyone that saileth any whither' by reason of her costliness, her merchandise of gold and precious stones and pearls, of fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, thyine wood and ivory, cinnamon and incense, wine and souls of men; and this Babylon too will have fallen when the sound of the flute is no more heard in her, and 'the light of a candle shall shine no more at all.' All languages are spoken in Babylon, yet with the same accent; here are gateways of the Moors in Spain, Venetian waterways, streets of Old Paris, and over all the undiscerning twilight. All men meet in Babylon who go on pilgrimages, for all roads end in Babylon, the Road of the San Grael, the Road of the Secret Rose.

It is long since the East made good its claim to Babylon in one thousand and one nights, and now among all the taverns there is none more crowded than the Inn of the Rubaiyat; yet on the farther side the city stretches dim and all but unexplored. There are even the fragments of an old wall in the heart of it, the ruins of an 'East Gate,' and beside it the shimmering darkness of a clump of willows. The scholars—for even scholars sometimes come to Babylon—have identified it as Yuen-K'ew, sometime chief city of the province of Ch'in, but this was by daylight; the theory is only tenable if Yuen-K'ew is the Chinese for Babylon.

For the Babylon beyond the broken wall is Old Babylon; its temple-lights are Songs of Sacrifice that were old when Buddha died. There are waste places with dark pools and the ghostly gleam of lotus; black reaches of a palace moat; and once a Chinese lantern flashes on a wall leprous with lichen and hideously stained. The streets are narrow, but they climb up and up, past darkened houses and 'mounds of red earth from whose sides strange trees grow out,' and suddenly break into broad daylight, and wide grassy spaces, with the swift flight of swallows overhead. Looking down, Babylon lies in a luminous mist shot through with

points of fire; but on the other side there is a great stretch of quiet water, and in its depths one sees the city of all legends, the oldest Babylon of all. There was morning glory on the trellis of the palace garden of Wei, and through fathoms of clear water one sees it yet. The very sunlight is molten; and the echoes of a drinking-song come faint but very joyous. The sound has travelled far. That water is thirty centuries deep.

It is through two stout volumes of 'The Chinese Classics' that this road to Babylon runs; a pleasant edition, printed at Hong Kong, and sold there 'At the Author's.' That author was Dr. Legge, sometime missionary in China, late Professor of Chinese at Oxford. He was not the first to find the road it was a Jesuit Father of the eighteenth century one Père Lacharme, who first passed under the 'East Gate' into the city of the Shih-King, but he wrote of it in Latin, and the book was not popular. This is the easier road; every lyric has its Chinese text, black and unfamiliar and satisfying; beneath it a prose translation of unflinching accuracy, and footnotes that unravel all things, from the habits of a sinister plant called tribulus —Shakespeare would have had it in his witches'

cauldron—to the wickedness of the Duke Seuen in his palace of Wei. It is the footnotes that create so gracious a sense of security, an atmosphere in which even the Duke Seuen loses half his terrors: the kindly precision of a scholar without guile.

And a generous scholar; for at the end of 'the great travail so gladly spent,' he leaves it to the pleasure of 'anyone who is willing to undertake the labour . . . to present the pieces in a faithful metrical version.' These stones are from his quarry; it was under the great Sinologue's Act of Indulgence that these lyrics were chosen. And though their fidelity might be matter of dispute (in seven lines only has the original rendering been strictly kept, the opening line of Odes I., XI. and XXXIII., the second and third of Ode II., and the last of Odes XXVIII. and XXXVI.), the defence was made long ago in the preface to a seventeenth-century translation from the French, in five volumes folio. 'The translator hath but turned the wrong side of the Arras towards us, for all translations, you know, are no other,' and it was only to compensate for the original colouring that a later hand 'hath inserted . . . false stitches of his own.'

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NOTE.—The dates are those suggested as approximate by Dr. Legge.

I

Written in B.C. 718.

It is the Chinese rendering of 'the world well lost.' Possibly, as one Yen Ts'an of the thirteenth century insists, 'intended to show the error of licentious connections.'

THE gourd has still its bitter leaves,
And deep the crossing at the ford.
I wait my lord.

The ford is brimming to its banks;
The pheasant cries upon her mate.
My lord is late.

The boatman still keeps beckoning,
And others reach their journey's end.
I wait my friend.

II

Written B.C. 826.

It is inconsistent with the finest ideal of chastity that a Chinese woman should break her perpetual widowhood.

Ah, let it drift, that boat of cypress wood,
There in the middle of the Ho.
He was my mate,
And until death I will go desolate.
Ah Mother! God!
How is it that ye will not understand?

Ah, let it drift, that boat of cypress wood,
There in the middle of the Ho.
He was my King.
I swear I will not do this evil thing.
Ah Mother! God!
How is it that ye will not understand?

III

Written in the twelfth century before Christ.

It is possibly the oldest drinking-song in the world.

The dew is heavy on the grass,
  At last the sun is set.
Fill up, fill up the cups of jade,
  The night 's before us yet!

All night the dew will heavy lie
  Upon the grass and clover.
Too soon, too soon, the dew will dry,
  Too soon the night be over!

IV

Written B.C. 1121.

He protests his loyalty.

WITHIN the massive cup of jade
The yellow liquid shines;
Our prince is sure a man of men,
And splendid are his wines.

V

Written in the twelfth century before Christ, *c.* 1121.

The morning glory climbs above my head,
Pale flowers of white and purple, blue and red.
I am disquieted.

Down in the withered grasses something stirred;
I thought it was his footfall that I heard.
Then a grasshopper chirred.

I climbed the hill just as the new moon showed,
I saw him coming on the southern road.
My heart lays down its load.

VI

Written *c.* 1114 B.C.

We load the sacrificial stands
  Of wood and earthen ware,
The smell of burning southernwood
  Is heavy in the air.

It was our fathers' sacrifice,
  It may be they were eased.
We know no harm to come of it;
  It may be God is pleased.

VII

Written B.C. 680.

The 'Little Preface': 'A man's praise of his Poor Wife.

I WENT out at the Eastern Gate,
I saw the girls in clouds,
Like clouds they were, and soft and bright,
But in the crowds
I thought on the maid who is my light,
Down-drooping, soft as the grey twilight;
She is my mate.

I went out by the Tower on the Wall,
I saw the girls in flower,
Like flowering rushes they swayed and bent,
But in that hour
I thought on the maid who is my saint,
In her thin white robe and her colouring faint;
She is my all.

VIII

Written B.C. 650.

'Other things,' says the 'Little Preface' solemnly, 'more difficult to overcome than Distance, may keep one from a Place.'

It is the yearning of a young wife for the home to which it was an indecorum that she should return.

How say they that the Ho is wide,
When I could ford it if I tried?
How say they Sung is far away,
When I can see it every day?

Yet must indeed the Ho be deep,
When I have never dared the leap;
And since I am content to stay,
Sung must indeed be far away.

IX

Written in the eighth century before Christ.

I SEE you with your bamboo rods
  Go fishing up the K'e.
Fain would I rise and come to you,
And all day long I think of you,
  But I am far away.

The waters of the K'e lie east,
  And west the Ts'en-yuen.
But now am I a married wife,
And maid that is a wedded wife,
  She comes not home again.

The waters of the K'e lie east,
  The Ts'en-yuen are west.
My white teeth flash, I smile on him,
These girdle-gems were given by him,
  His wife is richly drest.

There in the river leaped a fish.
  The oars dip in the K'e.
O that I might come back again,
And then I might forget again,
  Forget for but a day!

X

Written 718 B.C. from the harem of the Palace of Wei.

The wind blows from the North.
  He looks and his eyes are cold.
He looks and smiles and then goes forth,
  My grief grows old.

The wind blows and the dust.
  To-morrow he swears he will come.
His words are kind, but he breaks his trust,
  My heart is numb.

All day the wind blew strong,
  The sun was buried deep.
I have thought of him so long, so long,
  I cannot sleep.

The clouds are black with night,
  The thunder brings no rain.
I wake and there is no light,
  I bear my pain.

XI

Written B.C. 769 from the harem of the Palace of Wei.

'There are seven reasons,' said Confucius, 'for which a man may divorce his wife. . . . The seven reasons are:—Disobedience to her husband's parents; not giving birth to a son; dissolute conduct; jealousy of her husband's attentions to the other members of his harem; talkativeness; and thieving. *All these regulations were adopted by the Sages in harmony with the natures of men and women.*'

YELLOW 's the robe for honour,
And green is for disgrace.
I wear the green and not the gold,
And turn away my face.

I wear the green of scorning,
Who wore the gold so long.
I think upon the Sages,
Lest I should do them wrong.

It is for her he shames me.
I sit and think apart.
I wonder if the Sages knew
A woman's heart.

XII

Written 700 B.C. against the Duke Seuen.

The Little Preface: 'The Things done in the Inner Room of the Palace of Wei were Shameful Things.'

The tribulus grows on the wall,
  Upon the stain.
The things done in that inner room
  Men cannot name.

The tribulus grows on the wall.
  The stain is old.
The evil of that inner room
  May not be told.

XIII

The inner history of the Palace of Wei is something of a 'chronique scandaleuse,' and the Duke Seuen is the heir of an evil tradition. This tragedy is before his day. Most of the commentators refer it to the dismissal in disgrace of one Tae-Kwei, a hapless and gentle lady of the harem of Duke Chwang, a dismissal preluded by the murder of her only son. It happened in 718 B.C.; it is a grief that is twenty-seven centuries old.

The swallows take their flight
Across the ford.
My lady goes from sight;
And I must bring her on her way,
Yet leave her ere the close of day,
So wills her lord.

The swallows take their flight,
Again they come.
My lady goes from sight;
And far must I escort her to the South,
From whence no spring-time wind nor summer drouth
Shall bring her home.

XIV

Written B.C. 826.

He complains of a broken assignation.

The willows by the Eastern Gate
  Are deep in sheltering leaves.
You said 'Before the night grows late,'
  —There's twittering in the eaves.

The willows by the Eastern Gate
  All night in shadow are.
You said 'Before the night grows late,'
  —There shines the morning star.

XV

Written B.C. 718.

I CANNOT come to you. I am afraid.
I will not come to you. There, I have said.
Though all the night I lie awake and know
That you are lying, waking, even so.
Though day by day you take the lonely road,
And come at nightfall to a dark abode.

Yet if so be you are indeed my friend,
Then in the end,
There is one road, a road I 've never gone,
And down that road you shall not pass alone.
And there 's one night you 'll find me by your side.
The night that they shall tell me you have died.

XVI

Written *c.* 605 B.C.

The rushes on the marsh are green,
And in the wind they bend.
I saw a woman walking there,
Near daylight's end.

On the black water of the marsh,
The lotus buds swim white.
I saw her standing by the verge
At fall of night.

All the long night I lie awake,
And sleep I cannot find.
I see her slim as any rush
Sway in the wind.

I shut my eyes and see again
The whiteness of her throat,
On the black water of the night
Like lotus float.

XVII

A variant of the same.

I saw the marsh with rushes dank and green,
And deep black pools beneath a sunset sky,
And lotus silver bright
Gleam on their blackness in the dying light,
As I passed by.

And all that night I saw as in a dream
Her fair face lifted up
Shine in the darkness like a lotus cup,
Snow-white against the deep black pool of night,
Till dawn was nigh.

XVIII

The joyous rollick of the metre would seem to suggest a rustic Don Juan, but even in the eighth century B.C. the poets had learned the uses of the pastoral, and Dr. Legge assures us that hereby three notorious court intrigues are obscurely glanced at. In brief, to quote the 'Little Preface,' 'A Gentleman sings of his Intimacy with Various Noble Ladies.' There is evidently an unsuspected strain of the 'gaillard' in an imperturbable nation.

I AM going to gather the wheat
  In the fields of Mei.
But my thoughts are not on the whitening wheat.
Fairest and fair of the maids of the Keang,
She whom I met at the fair of Sang-chung,
She is to meet me in far Shang-kung,
And then for the road with me through Ke-shang,
  And into the fields of Mei.

I am going to gather the millet
  In the north of Mei.
But my thoughts are not on the new-mown millet.
Fairest and fair of the maids of the Yung,

She whom I met at the fair of Sang-chung,
She is to meet me in far Shang-kung,
And then for the road with me through Ke-shang,
And into the north of Mei.

I am going to gather the rye,
In the east of Mei.
But my thoughts are not on the ripening rye.
Fairest and fair of the maids of the Wang,
She whom I met at the fair of Sang-chung,
She is to meet me in far Shang-kung,
And then for the road with me through Ke-shang,
And into the east of Mei.

XIX

Written B.C. 718.

The K'e still ripples to its banks,
The moorfowl cry.
My hair was gathered in a knot,
And you came by.

Selling of silk you were, a lad
Not of our kin;
You passed at sunset on the road
From far-off Ts'in.

The frogs were croaking in the dusk;
The grass was wet.
We talked together, and I laughed:
I hear it yet.

I thought that I would be your wife;
I had your word.
And so I took the road with you,
And crossed the ford.

I do not know when first it was
  Your eyes looked cold.
But all this was three years ago,
  And I am old.

XX

Written 769 B.C.

My lord is gone away to serve the King.
The pigeons homing at the set of sun
Are side by side upon the courtyard wall,
And far away I hear the herdsmen call
The goats upon the hill when day is done.
But I, I know not when he will come home.
I live the days alone.

My lord is gone away to serve the King.
I hear a pigeon stirring in the nest,
And in the field a pheasant crying late.
—She has not far to go to find her mate.
There is a hunger will not let me rest.
The days have grown to months and months to years,
And I have no more tears.

XXI

Written 675 B.C.

'Is there anything whereof it may be said, 'See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.'

I WOULD have gone to my lord in his need,
Have galloped there all the way,
But this is a matter concerns the State,
And I, being a woman, must stay.

I watched them leaving the palace yard,
In carriage and robe of state.
I would have gone by the hills and the fords;
I know they will come too late.

I may walk in the garden and gather
Lilies of mother-of-pearl.
I had a plan would have saved the State.
—But mine are the thoughts of a girl.

The Elder Statesmen sit on the mats,
And wrangle through half the day;
A hundred plans they have drafted and dropped,
And mine was the only way.

XXII

Written 780 B.C.

'Only a Chinese,' says Dr. Legge pleasantly, 'will agree that it is a bad thing for a woman to be wise.'

'Admirable may be the wise woman,' so runs an unversed couplet of the original, 'But she is an owl.'

The wise man's wisdom is our strength,
The woman's wisdom is our bane.
The men build up the city walls
For women to tear down again.

No man from any woman's wit
Hath yet learned aught of any worth,
For wise is she, but unto ill,
To bring disorder on the earth.

What does she in affairs of State?
Her place is in the inner room.
Her wisdom doth least hurt in this,
To mind the silkworm and the loom.

XXIII

Written 780 B.C.

When first the guests approach the mats
  Their manners are correct;
And even when they well have drunk,
  They still are circumspect.

But when the guests have drunk too much,
  They lose sobriety;
They shout and brawl and loudly sing,
  —An impropriety.

If when a guest has drunk too much
  He courteously depart,
His host and he would happy be,
  Each having done his part.

But to remain when one is drunk
  Is not a virtuous thing.
To drinking, though a custom good,
  One must deportment bring.

XXIV

Written in 780 B.C.

The lyrics of this decade are of a darker temper. It is the spirit of the Jacquerie, the far-off anticipation of 'Ça ira.'

No man is in the fields,
  The forest 's stripped and bare,
A few poor faggots left,
  And there is none to care.

These men are in great place,
  And still they grind the State.
The people cry to heaven,
  And think that God is great.
  —Is He too great to hate?

XXV

780 B.C.

Jacques Bonhomme complains of the useless stars.

I SEE on high the Milky Way,
But here 's a rougher road.
The Sacred Oxen shining stand ;
They do not draw our load.

The Sieve is sparkling in the South,
But good and ill come through.
The Ladle opens wide its mouth,
And pours out naught for you.

At dawn the Weaving Sisters sleep,
At dusk they rise again ;
But though their Shining Shuttle flies,
They weave no robe for men.

XXVI

780 B.C.

He complains of the unfairness of things.

If there are fish within the trap,
They 'll churn it as they leap.
If none, you 'll see the water black,
And stars in it asleep.

—The water in the trap is black,
The stars are shining still—
If some men get enough to eat,
There 's few can get their fill.

XXVII

780 B.C. in the King's Court.

Under the pondweed do the great fish go,
In the green darkness where the rushes grow.
The King is in Hao.

Under the pondweed do the great fish lie;
Down in Hao the sunny hours go by.
The King holds revelry.

Under the pondweed do the great fish sleep;
The dragon-flies are drowsy in the heat.
The King is drinking deep.

XXVIII

780 B.C. 'The writing on the wall.'

Before the snow comes sleet,
And wind from out the East.
One moment may let slip
Our goodly fellowship.
Death clutches at our feet.
Who knows when next we meet?
Yet still the wine is sweet.
O King, enjoy the feast!

XXIX

On early morning.

Written under the T'ang dynasty; this, with the four following lyrics, is of a later date than the odes of the 'Shih-King.'

Peach blossom after rain
  Is deeper red;
The willow fresher green;
  Twittering overhead;
And fallen petals lie wind-blown,
Unswept upon the courtyard stone.

XXX

From Sir John Davies' 'Poetry of the Chinese.'
This, and the lyric following, are surely snatches of some Chinese 'Rubaiyat.'

The world is weary, hasting on its road ;
Is it worth while to add its cares to thine?
Seek for some grassy place to pour the wine,
And find an idle hour to sing an ode.

XXXI

From Sir John Davies' 'Poetry of the Chinese.'

You 've two score, three score years before you yet,
  And at the end of them your day is done.
A thousand plans you have before you set:
  Is it worth while to weary over one?

Now, when the gods have made an idle day,
  Take it, and let the idle hours go by;
And when the gods three cups before you lay,
  Lift them, and drain them dry.

XXXII

From Sir John Davies' 'Poetry of the Chinese.

'Mulier recte olet ubi nihil olet.'

Blue iris sweetest smells,
  Upon its stem unbroken.
A woman highest sells,
  With her fair name unspoken.

XXXIII

Written in the seventh century before Christ.

On the moor is the creeping grass,
  Parched, thirsting for the dew,
And over it the swallows dip and pass,
  The live-long summer through.
I came at sunset, fevered with the heat,
  Seeking I knew not what with listless feet.

On the moor is the creeping grass,
  Deep-drenchèd with the dew,
And over it the swallows dip and pass,
  The live-long summer through.
You came at sunrise, ere the dew was dried,
  And I am satisfied.

XXXIV

Written under the T'ang dynasty.

The moon is shining on this borderland,
Just as it will be shining on Lung-t'ow.
The sea is very quiet on the sand;
I wonder what the folk are doing now.

The wild geese settle with the same old cry,
The moonlight sleeps upon the threshold stone.
The millet in the field is shoulder high,
And my young wife goes up the path alone.

XXXV

A gathering of the clans in the ninth century before Christ.

How goes the night?
Midnight has still to come.
Down in the court the torch is blazing bright;
I hear far off the throbbing of the drum.

How goes the night?
The night is not yet gone.
I hear the trumpets blowing on the height;
The torch is paling in the coming dawn.

How goes the night?
The night is past and done.
The torch is smoking in the morning light,
The dragon banner floating in the sun.

XXXVI

Written B.C. 1121.

WHITE clouds are in the sky.
Great shoulders of the hills
Between us two must lie.
The road is rough and far.
Deep fords between us are.
I pray you not to die.

'Their memory is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished.'

Printed in Great Britain by T. and A. Constable Ltd.
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